

# Swedish American Genealogist

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## Book Reviews

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# Book Reviews

Here you will find information about interesting books on the immigration experience, genealogical manuals, books on Swedish customs, and much more. We welcome contacts with SAG readers, suggestions on books to review perhaps. If you want to review a book yourself, please contact the SAG Editor, at <sag@etgenealogy.se> so we know what you are working on.

## Another crime in Bishop Hill

*Clouds Over Bishop Hill*, by Mary Davidsaver. Published by MWC Press, Davenport, IA, 2016. Paperback. Amazon.com, \$14.92, Kindle edition \$7.95.

Mary Davidsaver is a former Bishop Hill resident for some 25 years and a debutant author. Her book is not as much about Bishop Hill as about the main character Shelley Anderson. The old colony buildings appear only in a brief description. The other buildings that play a role in the action are fictitious with the exception of the Lutfisk Café, which can be recognized as the Filling Station Restaurant. The locals gather at the café to gossip and eat. Shelley orders Swedish pancakes with lingonberry jam for breakfast and a hamburger later in the day.

Shelley has just graduated from a nearby college and is on her way home to Bishop Hill when she is run off the road by a 103-year old woman, Pearl, who is old enough to remember Olof Krans, the Bishop Hill Colony landscape and portrait painter. (Krans is the only person in the book that can be recognized by his real name.) The

next time we meet Pearl she stands over a dead man with a blood-stained hammer in her hand. She talks incoherently about a cross in the sky that has led her to Herb Anderson's workshop and antique store. "The painting has to be here," Pearl says. Shelley calls 911 and asks for an ambulance for Pearl. As an afterthought, she asks for the sheriff. The sheriff's deputy, Dana Johnson, comes out from Cambridge and questions Shelley. The dead man, Herb Anderson, was a colony descendant and was well-liked and had many relatives in the area, but the residents go on with their daily lives and attend a gala dinner celebration as if nothing has happened.

Shelley had planned to go to graduate school and get away from the confines of Bishop Hill, but she didn't get the scholarships she needed. For the time being, she takes a summer job at the new museum and conference center (fictitious) called Nikkerbo, owned by Chicagoan Curt Hamcourt V, and managed by David Ekollon (tr. acorn), the museum director. Both men carry guns. The third character toting a gun is the chief financial officer from Chicago, Thomas T. Gubben. (tr. Old Man). A fourth male character, Gordon Anderson, who may or may not have a gun, is the cousin of Herb Anderson. Gordon is an artist and paints pictures. At one time he had a shop in the Blacksmith Building.

Since Mr. Ekollon has disappeared, Mr. Hamcourt employs Shelley as temporary director. He closes the Nikkerbo Museum for a few days because he thinks that Shelley needs to recover from having discovered the murder scene. She uses her free time to do some sleuthing for the missing painting that Pearl has described as a portrait of the colony founder, here named Karl Hamson. She gets some help from Michael J. Anderson, a tow-truck driver, whom she knows from high school. (There are many Andersons in the story and they are not

related.) Shelley meets a young heartthrob, Lars Trollenberg, who has come from Stockholm to study genealogy. He is trusted with the keys to the museum, and it's his job to lock it up at night and tum on the alarm. Shelley coaxes him to keep it open a little longer so that she can sleuth in the museum. Her action is caught by the security camera.

Shelley is not the only one searching for the painting that Pearl has described. If found, it would be the only image of the colony founder in existence. At least three men are ready to kill to get their hands on a Krans original. One man had planned to sell it in Sweden. The reader has to concentrate to understand the roles and possible motives of the many characters and guess who the killer might be.

Bishop Hill was founded in 1846 by Swedish religious dissenters. The village is on the Register of National Landmarks. Bishop Hill has a dark past, which is not mentioned in the book. The colony leader, a self-proclaimed prophet, was murdered in 1850. The trustees who took over the leadership speculated in railroad stocks and lost money that belonged to everyone in

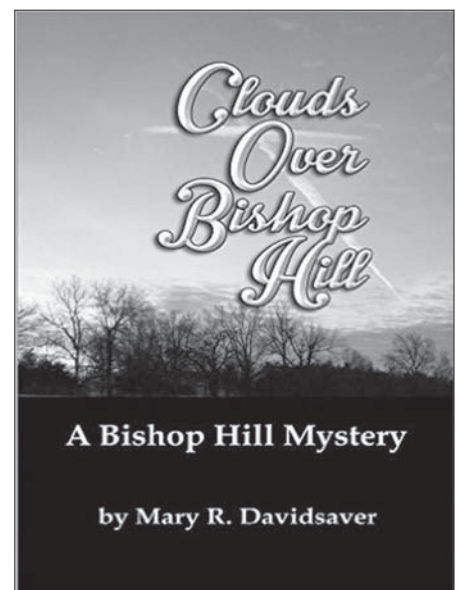
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# Book Reviews



the communal settlement. The lawsuit that followed lasted for many years with no verdict. The colonists had to pay the debts and the court costs. Having existed for 15 years, the Bishop Hill Colony was dissolved in 1860-61.

*Clouds Over Bishop Hill* replicates some of Bishop Hill's dark past, which might be the reason why the author decided to understate the bombshell death of Herb Anderson. The biggest mystery to this reviewer is that the approximately 200 inhabitants of Bishop don't seem to react to the gruesome killing. Everyone must realize that the 103-year old woman could not have killed the physically active woodworker Herb Anderson. It seems odd that there are no headlines in the newspapers and no radio or television reporters swarming the village. In the early summer of 2008, all the stores and museums would have been open and welcoming tourists. Yet, the tourists are absent.

None of the male characters listed above are developed well enough to be of much interest. Another character, Roy Landers, caught my attention. Roy is an accomplished artist who also has the ability to imitate the folk-art style of Krans. At one time, he was forced to paint a forgery of a Krans painting. Shelley calls him Uncle Roy, but he's her adoptive father and separated from his wife, Christina. Roy lives alone in a cabin, drinks too much, and sometimes disappears. The main character of Shelley Anderson seems cold and calculating. Her family history is unbelievably complicated and of little importance to the story.

There are some inconsistencies in the use of the peculiar names of the characters that might create confusion. At times, I had to go back a page or two to find out who-is-who. A character description would have been helpful. The writing is polished and written in the 'first person' as the voice of

Shelley Anderson. Shots are fired risking people's lives. Will the murder be solved, or is it more important to find the missing painting? The reader can expect the clouds to thicken.

Those who have read *Witness in Bishop Hill* by Sara Hoskinson Frommer will notice that both books feature an old confused lady discovering the murder scene and a bloody body, but that is where the similarities end.

Lilly Setterdahl

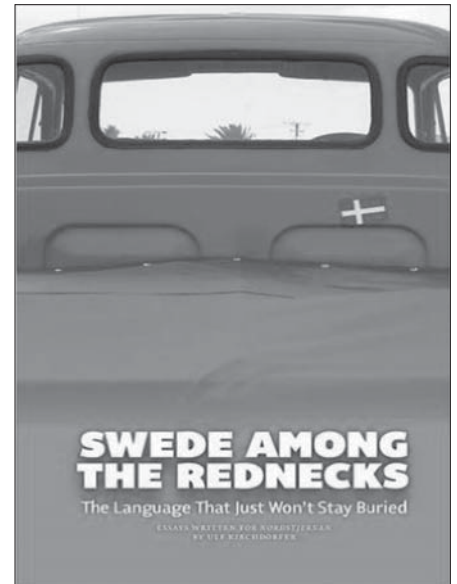
## A Swede's point of views

*Swede among the Rednecks. The Language That Just Won't Stay Buried.* Essays written for *Nordstjernan* by Ulf Kirchdorfer published by *Nordstjernan Forlag*, New York 2015. 164 pages, paperback. \$14.95.

The 42 essays in this book were originally published in the Swedish American newspaper *Nordstjernan* and covered a multitude of topics and thoughts regarding the past, current, and future events; some related to the author's Swedish upbringing. Many of his thoughts in these articles are reminiscences of his childhood, as is the recurring theme related to lawn mowing. The book is dedicated to his mother.

Ulf Kirchdorfer is a professor with a PhD in English at Darton College in Georgia where he teaches modern American literature and English composition. With other credits to his name, he is well qualified to comment on traditions in both Sweden and the United States. And he does! He is a native-born Swede that has lived in other places in Europe – Germany for one, I believe, and even Texas!

When was the last time you thought of Ingmar Bergman or Pippi Longstocking? He comments on "The Sinful Ingmar Bergman" and wonders if Pippi should be censored for being racist, in separate musings, of course. So you see, many of the titles are provocative and compel you



to continue to read on.

Also, he recounted some of his early traditions that marked different holidays in Sweden. Christmas is an important one. Reading "*Glögg*" and "*Julskinka*," Okay, but "*Stjärngosse*?" will recall memories of your past Christmas activities and your feelings as you relive them. He does clarify that they are not related to each other.

It might help to have a Swedish-English dictionary available. Some of us (raised in Swedish American homes with little spoken Swedish) are not familiar with some of the Swedish words that help you catch his deeper meaning or understand the English meaning.

I felt more Swedish upon completing this reading! I gained insight into some family traditions and recall with more understanding some of my relatives. Some of them lived their adult lives in the U.S. but never left Sweden.

There is more than one nod, smile, or even a chuckle as you read this compilation.

Alice M. Johnson



Fat Tuesday  
is on 28  
February





# Book Reviews

## Northwest Swedes

*Immigrants of the Independence Valley*, by Dick Erickson. Published by the Swedish Finn Historical Society. 8 x10, 300 pages of photos and text. Contact Dick Erickson Dick Erickson at <twoswedese@aol.com>.

When Scandinavian immigration to Washington State is considered, most of the

references are to settlement in the major cities of Spokane and Seattle. What is not as well known are the immigrants who came to the rural areas of the West Coast, primarily to work in the logging and fishing industries. Most desired to become farmers but first needed additional work to be able to afford land. Many Swedes and Swedish-speaking Finns settled around Rochester, Washington, located about 25 miles south of Olympia, and established small farms.

This is a wonderful reference book with many photographs and detailed charts about the Scandinavian settlement of this area. The author's family first settled here in the 1890's. Although the book is intended primarily to be of interest to those with roots in this area, it is a good reference book for what Scandinavian life was like in rural Western Washington in the first part of the 1900's. An appendix is included at

the back listing the names and some genealogical information for the "Nordic Immigrants to the Rochester Area." A great community and a Scandinavian history reference. If there is any fault with the book it is that it requires through reading as there is no table of contents or content index. The book is a labor of love as Erickson states he loses money on every book sold!

Ann Wick



This book can also be read on the web site of the Swedish Finn Historical Society, see [link on page 26](#).

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**For more information, write:**  
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# Book Reviews

## WW II seen from Sweden

*Krigsdagböcker 1939–1945*, by Astrid Lindgren. Published 2015 by Salikon förlag. Hardcover, 366 pages, ISBN 9789187659041. **In Swedish!**

This book contains the war diaries of Astrid Lindgren, not yet a famous author, just a Stockholm housewife with husband and two children, a clerk in the Swedish secret letter censorship, which allowed her to gain knowledge of many phases of the war that never reached the public.

She started her diaries on the first day of WW II, and kept on writing, not every day, but until Christmas 1945. She followed the war in newspapers, and clipped lots of newspaper reports, of which some are included in the book. At the same time Astrid Lindgren writes about her family and how the war affected them. Food rations are diminishing, coffee and eggs become scarce, and no fish can be bought.



But the Lindgrens are lucky, her parents live on a farm in Småland and can send food. She also tells about good times, going to the movies and the theater and birthday parties for the children. But in the background the war is sometimes very close. The Finnish Winter War causes people to send their children to safety in Sweden. The occupations of Norway and Denmark frighten her, and her husband is mobilized for a short time. Through her work she early on realizes the atrocities that are committed against the Jews in Nazi Germany and its conquered areas, and is appalled. She feels Sweden is very lucky to escape much of the war, which makes it possible to help the people of the neighboring countries in various ways.

*Elisabeth Thorsell*

### SAG needs your help!

We regard the reviews as a very important part of SAG, as the readers are spread all over the U.S., Canada, and Sweden and a lone subscriber even in Australia.

For all of them it is very difficult to keep track of the many interesting books (and movies) that are published with a *Swedish* or *Swedish-American* theme.

We need you to keep your eyes open. And we are extremely pleased if you will write a review and send it to the SAG editor.

Family histories, church histories, local group histories, and lodge histories are among the things we would like to present in SAG. And all in English.

A good book review contains the full title of the book, name of author, year of printing, name of publisher, where it can be bought, and the price of the book.

Send all book reviews to the SAG editor!

*Elisabeth Thorsell*  
SAG editor

## New and Noteworthy

(Short notes on interesting book and articles)

SAG reader *Jean Larson* of Dallas, TX, has sent SAG the following tips on books: Because of the interest expressed in DNA and genealogy during the SAG trip to Salt Lake City, I thought I would send the names of two books that have come out recently. Both were written by people I have taken courses with and they are very good. The first one is *The Family Tree Guide to DNA Testing and Genetic Genealogy* by Blaine Bettinger and it is available on Amazon. The other is *Genetic Genealogy in Practice* by Blaine Bettinger and Debbie Parker Wayne. It was published by the National Genealogical Society and is available on their website, <http://www.ngsgenealogy.org/>. Blaine's book is an overview of all aspects of DNA testing and can be used as a reference. It also has a lot of charts and pictures to help the reader understand so I recommend the hardcover over the Kindle version. Blaine and Debbie's book also gives an overview but also includes exercises to complete. When I was taking the DNA courses I found exercises to very helpful in understanding the concepts.

Genetic genealogy has many concepts that are difficult to understand, so reading about something over and over is necessary, unless you are a biochemist. I would suggest reading Blaine's book to get an overview and then reading Blaine and Debbie's book to read and do the exercises.